The Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art Presents Brand-New & Terrific: Alex Katz in the 1950s

News Release
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Artist to give free lecture at the museum May 12

Cleveland, OH (April 27, 2017) – ***Brand-New & Terrific: Alex Katz in the 1950s*** is the largest museum exhibition to showcase Alex Katz's (b. 1927) innovative portraits, landscapes and still lifes from this pioneering period. Organized by the Colby College Museum of Art in Waterville, Maine, in close collaboration with Katz, this presentation explores the first decade of the artist's career, a period characterized by fierce experimentation from which his signature brightly colored figurative paintings emerged. The exhibition's title derives from Katz's early manifesto announcing his intentions to invigorate traditional artistic subject matter. Creating work at a time when abstract painting dominated the art scene, Katz forged an ingenious way to wed abstraction with recognizable imagery by paring down his compositions to their most fundamental elements. In retrospect, these works prefigured the subsequent development of Pop Art. The exhibition includes more than 80 key loans from public and private collections, including many rarely seen works from the artist's own holdings as well as a sampling of Katz's works from the CMA collection. In a free program on May 12 at the Cleveland Museum of Art, the artist will talk about his early works on view in the exhibition. ***Brand-New & Terrific: Alex Katz in the 1950s*** is on view in the Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation Hall at the Cleveland Museum of Art April 30 through August 6, 2017.

"We are thrilled to present an exhibition on the work of Alex Katz, one of the most acclaimed artists working today," said William Griswold, director of the Cleveland Museum of Art. "The exhibition celebrates an experimental period for the artist and provides a rare opportunity to view works from his momentous first decade."

Born and raised in New York, Katz studied at the Cooper Union in the late 1940s and then attended Maine's Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 1949 and 1950. There, the artist first began to paint from life and found the subjects he would depict for years to come—the Maine landscape, his circle of friends and domestic interiors.

An examination of this pivotal decade, ***Brand-New & Terrific: Alex Katz in the 1950s*** presents a stunning collection of groundbreaking paintings, cutouts and collages that laid the foundation for the artist's mature style—the vibrant palette and vivid placement of a figure against a solid ground—that emerged toward the end of the decade. The works on view in the exhibition provide a fascinating look at a young, thoughtful and ambitious talent developing his style for a successful career.

"One of the many things I love about this exhibition is the opportunity to see an immensely creative mind at work," said Mark Cole, curator of American painting and sculpture at the Cleveland Museum of Art. "Katz's innovations during the 1950s came fast and furious, and through this choice selection of paintings, collages and cutouts, we can witness the artist's astonishing development. Ultimately these works of art are marvelous, as visually appealing as they are thought provoking."

During an early phase in the 1950s, Katz turned to found photographs as a source for painting and studied amateur black-and-white photographs in order to analyze their visual cues. This process energized him to paint broadly, while blocking out forms, adding colors and omitting details—all in the service of augmenting the pictorial flatness and stillness he admired so much in the original source material. In 1954 he began making collages from watercolored paper, inspired in part by the cut-paper constructions of Henri Matisse. Intimate in scale and delicate in construction, these works formed a distinctive body of work that complemented his larger paintings. By the late 1950s, Katz adapted this technique to invent his freestanding or wall-mounted "cutouts," a revolutionary blending of painting and sculpture.

Unique to the Cleveland venue, ***Brand-New & Terrific: Alex Katz in the 1950s*** features an additional gallery highlighting later works by Katz from the Cleveland Museum of Art's permanent collection. Dating to the 1960s and '70s, these objects are anchored by the monumental canvas *Impala* from 1968. Also featured are six prints by Katz in various media—incorporating portraiture, landscape and still life—demonstrating the great extent to which the artist's work from the 1950s informed his subsequent career.

Brand-New & Terrific: Alex Katz in the 1950s opened at the Colby College Museum of Art in July 2015, and is curated by Diana Tuite, Katz Curator at Colby. The exhibition will be on view at the Neuberger Museum of Art at Purchase College, State University of New York from June 17 to October 14, 2018.

Highlights in *Brand-New & Terrific: Alex Katz in the 1950s*

Four People, 1953–54. Alex Katz (American, b. 1927). Oil on Masonite; 60.9 x 60.9 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Seventy-fifth anniversary gift of the artist, 1991.310. Art © Alex Katz / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

Katz has a long association with the Cleveland Museum of Art, reflected in his generous gift of *Four People*, an important early work of 1953–54, in honor of the museum's 75th anniversary in 1991. *Four People* is among Katz's finest photo-based paintings, serving as a key piece in the selection of artwork on view in the exhibition. Because of its high degree of abstraction, it uncannily anticipates the reductive portraits he produced later in the decade.

Blueberry Field, 1955. Alex Katz (American, b. 1927). Oil on Masonite; 81.3 x 121.9 cm. Collection of the artist. Art © Alex Katz / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

This Maine landscape rendered with painterly patches of bright color acknowledges the influences of contemporary abstract expressionists—such as Jackson Pollock—who placed a premium on gestural brushwork.

Wildflowers in Vase, c. 1954–55. Alex Katz (American, b. 1927). Collage with cut and watercolored paper; 27.9 x 21.3 cm. Collection of the artist. Art © Alex Katz / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

An early example of Katz's collage work is this sprightly image of multicolored blooms in a taupe vessel perched on a tabletop. With their modest, spare arrangements of form, Katz's collages would soon impact his work in oil.

Bather, 1959. Alex Katz (American, b. 1927). Oil on linen; 121.9 x 182.9 cm. Colby College Museum of Art, Museum purchase made possible by Peter and Paula Lunder through the Lunder Foundation, Michael Gordon ’66, Barbara and Theodore Alfond through the Acorn Foundation, and the Jere Abbott Acquisitions Fund, 2016.189. Art © Alex Katz / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

Here Katz presents Ada del Moro—his recently wedded wife and destined frequent muse—in an astonishingly sparse image that forsakes extraneous detail for broad areas of color, including a large area of blue that wittily merges sea and sky. The composition’s flat shapes with hard-edged outlines echo the artist’s forays into collage, an important medium he had mastered just a few years earlier.

Impala, 1968. Alex Katz (American, b. 1927). Oil on canvas; framed: 187 x 278 x 4 cm (73 9/16 x 109 7/16 x 1 9/16 in.); unframed: 182.9 x 276.9 cm (72 x 109 in.). Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund and Gift of the Eppler Family Foundation and Agnes Gund, 1983.68.

Impala is a monumental canvas occasioned by a drive through the mountainous landscape of Utah. The painting's point of view approximates a driver's quick sideways glance, showing viewers the profile of Katz's wife Ada del Moro immersed in thought as she sits next to him in the titular Chevrolet.

Tickets

Tickets for ***Brand-New & Terrific: Alex Katz*** in the 1950s are $12 for adults; seniors and college students $10; children ages 6–17 $6; children 5 and under free. Museum members free; member guests $6.

Exhibition Catalogue

Celebrating an experimental decade in the career of Alex Katz, ***Brand-New & Terrific: Alex Katz in the 1950s*** introduces audiences to Katz's relatively unknown body of his work. This fully illustrated complementary hardcover catalogue features essays by Diana Tuite, Katz curator, Colby College Museum of Art; Katy Siegel, Eugene V. and Clare E. Thaw Endowed Chair in Modern American Art, Stony Brook University; Richard Shiff, Effie Marie Cain Regents Chair in Art, University of Texas at Austin; and Eva Díaz, assistant professor of history of art and design, Pratt Institute.

The catalogue can be purchased for $60.00 at the Cleveland Museum of Art's store, or online by visiting cmastore.org.

SEE IT FIRST, SEE IT FREE! Member Preview Days

Fri/April 28, 10:00–9:00

Sat/April 29, 10:00–5:00

Become a member and be the first to see ***Brand-New & Terrific: Alex Katz in the 1950s*** for FREE. Members of the Cleveland Museum of Art receive discounted or free admission to the museum's special events and exhibitions.

Programming

In Conversation: Diana Tuite and Alex Katz
Friday, May 12, 2017
7:00 p.m.
Gartner Auditorium
Join artist Alex Katz and curator Diana Tuite, the Colby College Museum of Art, for a lively discussion about Katz's career and works in the exhibition ***Brand-New & Terrific: Alex Katz in the 1950s***, on view April 30 through August 6.
Free, tickets required. Register online at engage.clevelandart.org or by calling the ticket center at 216-421-7350.

MIX: Terrific
Friday, June 2, 6:00–10:00 p.m. Atrium
Explore the innovative portraits, still lifes, and landscapes of artist Alex Katz in the exhibition ***Brand-New and & Terrific: Alex Katz in the 1950s***. Enjoy music, drinks, and art activities inspired by the artist's work, and take a tour of American art ranging from colonial to contemporary.
$10 in advance, $15 day of event. CMA members FREE. MIX is an 18-and-over event.

Art and Fiction Book Club: Alex Katz and John Updike
Two Wednesdays, July 12 and 19, 1:30–2:30 p.m. Classroom E
The Art and Fiction Book Club connects the written word to works of art on view in special exhibitions and the permanent collection galleries. Books are selected to highlight a variety of historical periods, artistic movements, and points of view, with the aim of challenging, intriguing, and inspiring readers to explore wide-ranging styles, genres, and formats of both art and fiction. Each two-week session includes a gallery tour highlighting objects relevant to the reading selection, and a discussion led by museum educators that includes a short lecture covering broad historical context and conversation with other attendees about the book and related artworks.

Discover mid-century American with stories from The Same Door, Short Stories by John Updike and a tour of *Brand-New and Terrific: Alex Katz in the 1950s*. (Selected readings: "Friends from Philadelphia," "The Kid's Whistling," "Snowing in Greenwich Village," "The Alligators," and "The Happiest I've Been.")

$35 per session/CMA members $30 per session. Register online at engage.clevelandart.org or by phone at 216-421-7350. Participants purchase book on their own.

Katz and Cocktails: Paint Night
Friday, July 28, 6:00–8:30, Classroom F & G.

Paint your own Alex Katz-inspired masterpiece! Join us for an evening of art, drinks, and fun as our teaching artists lead you through the steps to create a Katz-inspired work of art. All supplies and one drink included; cash bar available.

$45/$30 CMA members. Register early; space is limited.

Presenting Sponsor: Baker Hostetler

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About the Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art is renowned for the quality and breadth of its collection, which includes more than 63,000 artworks and spans 6,000 years of achievement in the arts. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship and performing arts and is a leader in digital innovations. One of the top comprehensive art museums in the nation, recognized for its award-winning Open Access program and free of charge to all, the Cleveland Museum of Art is located in the University Circle neighborhood.

The museum is supported in part by residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture and made possible in part by the Ohio Arts Council (OAC), which receives support from the State of Ohio and the National Endowment for the Arts. The OAC is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally and economically. For more information about the museum and its holdings, programs and events, call 888-CMA-0033 or visit cma.org [1].

Press Announcements [2]

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